"Stealers 74!"

Text: Malachi 3:8-10,

"W[illegible]l man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How are we robbing thee?' In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

Scripture: II Corinthians 9:6-15

A preacher once remarked to a friend of his, "I know what people will put on my tombstone ---- The beggar died." Perhaps this may be on many preachers tombstones, and perhaps this is the image some people have about preachers in general. Therefore this morning, at the risk of furthering this thought in some people's minds, I would like to speak to you about a subject that church people do not like to hear too much about. And that is money. I do not believe ~~xxxx~~ in preaching about it very often, but at this time of the year wh[illegible] we are considering the budget and the needs of the church, I do not think it is out of line to do so. I realize of course that some folks would just as soon never have the preacher refer to it, because he is not supposed to worry or think about those things. But money is a fact of life whether you are in charge of a grocery store, or whether you are pastor of a church.

One of the most quoted stories of Jesus is probably the little story that is told in the Gospels of Mark and Luke and it ~~xxx~~ is made up of only 3 or 4 verses. The story is the one about the widows mite. ~~The~~ As it is related in both Gospels it tells of Jesus sitting near the treasury in the Synagogue and watching people put their money in. We are told that he saw many of the wealthy putting in large sums, but along comes this poor widow who places in the tresury two small coins, which were the equivalent of a penny. Jesus called His disciples to Him and remarked that this poor woman had placed into the bo[illegible] more than all the rest. She had given what little she had to the Lord, and therefore it was more acceptable. It was also the free giving spirit in which she gave that made it worth more.

This story tells a very good object lesson for all of us, but I believe it also has been responsible for a fallacy that some people have about church giving. The fallacy is that because Jesus condoned the giving of a small gift and said this gift was more acceptable to God, then this is a just cause for giving as little as we can, because this is what our Lord said to do.
(Illustration of boy & best show for a nickel)
Well I hate to burst any illusions that some of you may have had about this, but this is not necessarily so. The illustration concerns someone who could only give a small amount and this is what she gave.

The real point of the story is not what she gave, but how she gave. What Jesus was pointing out, was that a person may give large amounts of money and give it without love, and so it is given in vain. This is what Paul was telling the Corinthians as we read in our scripture, "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion." This then is the secret, to give with love and with joy. Have you ever received a gift that was given out of a sense of duty, rather than out of love? If you have you know how cold and lifeless such a gift is. By the same token if you have ever received a gift that was given strictly out of love, you know what a joy it is. This past week I received a gift from an 89 year old man that made me cry. I visited him in the hospital and read some scripture with him and prayed with him, all the while he held my hand real tight like a little child. And when I went to leave he pulled me down close to his face and kissed me on the cheek. That, was a gift given out of pure love. This is what God wants from us.
(Illustration of Kennedy and grand larceny)

When one considers this for the first time, it may seem that this is being a little harsh. But when we ask what God has to say about this, then we begin to see things in a different light. In the prophecy of Malachi the 3 chapter the 8th verse we read the question, "Will man rob God?" Naturally, we may ask, "How can we possibly rob God?" And if we read on in the 9th verse God answers, "Yet you are robbing me." And Malachi inserts the

question the Israelites must have asked, "But you say, "How are we robbing thee?" And the answer comes back from God, "In your tithes and offerings." So we see from this that the people of Israel were holding back on giving to the Lord what was rightfully His. But when we look at our own age and our own day we see that we have "Stealers 74." Many people in many different churches and denominations have adopted this attitude that God will have to be satisfied with whatever is left over after everything else is paid.

Times change attitudes and customs do they not? The Israelites were not blessed with many things, neither were they faced with many of the expenses that we have today. But their attitude was one of begrudging the Lord what was rightfully His. The attitude among many Christians since the beginning of the Christian church has been to strive to give to God before taking care of the other things of life. But slowly and surely this attitude has changed to one of taking care of our wants, and needs and desires, and if anything is left over, God can have it.

But in this thinking we can see the danger, just as the danger was spelled out by God for the Israelites. He says in the 10th verse, "You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me the whole nation of you." In this we can see that God will either be given 1st place in our lives, or He will exact a form of punsihment from us. Many people fight to hang onto possessions, such as homes and property of all kinds, and many times all sorts of things go wrong. But if the people would look at their lives and realize t that they are continually giving God second place, their lives maybtake a change for the better if they reversed their thinking. God also promises this in the very next verse of Malachi when He says, "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing." God is saying try me and see what will happen.

But you see people are reluctant to step out in faith when it comes to

giving to the Lord. The churches that I have served have all had a certain number of people who will say, "I do not believe in pledging." Which is ~~true and I accept it, and feel the same way~~ erroneous, for that same person will go out and buy a home and sign a mortgage for 20 or 25 years, which is a pledge for a long period of time. Or that person will go out and buy a new car and finance it for 3 years which is also a form of a pledge. ~~But you see these pledges are not like the pledges you give to a church.~~ With a church pledge you can determine what you want to pledge. With a house or a car, the lending institution will tell you that you must pay 70, 80, 100, or whatever dollars a month for a 3 yr period or 20 years. And you cannot come to them and say, "Look, I'm a little short this month and I can only give you a third of it, or half of it. It is all or you lose the car or house or whatever. With a pledge to the church, no one is going to hound you if you are laid off or you have problems meeting it.

So when a person says he does not believe in pledging, but buys cars, houses, furniture, etc on time, he is really saying, I ~~do not~~ believe in pledging anything but I do not believe in pledging to God. But you see these pledges are not like church pledges THEN WITH A CHURCH ETC

In all of this business of giving to God, it becomes a matter of doing it in faith. In faith that God is going to give you the health and the strength to be able to work and earn a living. And after all, where does our health and strength come from? It is a matter of trusting God that when he says He will open the windows of heaven and pour us out a blessing, then we must believe that He will. We can never outgive God, and unless you have taken this step of faith, you cannot understand what I am saying. It may not come to you in material things, but it may come to you with a healthy family. It may take the form of having a peaceful marriage and obedient children. It may take the form of contentment with your job and the people you work with. And just the reverse of these things can be true if you are miserly and selfish ~~with what God blesses you with~~ & ROBBING GOD. YES OUR ASTEWER TY VARIETY.

A very good example of what I have been trying to say, was proven in the life of Mr. LeTourneau the earth moving machinery man.

(Illustration of his tithing and the results)

Mr. Letourneau also gave liberally of himself in the work of the Lord, and a portion of our tithe can be given in this way. With the cost of inflation

We are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for ourselves a good foundation for the future so that we may take hold on the life which is life indeed.

ST. PAUL'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
BUTLER, PENNSYLVANIA
TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST NOVEMBER 3, 1974
REV. RALPH C. LINK, PASTOR
MRS. MARILYN STEPHENSON, ORGANIST
MR. RALPH COOPER, CHOIR DIRECTOR
GREG BOSKO, MARCIA MCBRIDE - ACOLYTES

ORDER OF WORSHIP 11:00 A.M.

PRELUDE MUSIC: "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD" WOOLER
"ARIEL" DOIGE

SILENT PRAYER
*PROCESSIONAL HYMN NO. 271 "O JESUS, I HAVE PROMISED"
*ASCRIPTION - CHORAL AMEN
*EXHORTATION
*CONFESSION (IN UNISON) "ETERNAL GOD, IN WHOM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING, WHOSE FACE IS HIDDEN FROM US BY OUR SINS, AND WHOSE MERCY WE FORGET IN THE BLINDNESS OF OUR HEARTS; CLEANSE US, WE BESEECH THEE, FROM ALL OUR OFFENSES, AND DELIVER US FROM PROUD THOUGHTS AND VAIN DESIRES; THAT WITH LOWLINESS AND MEEKNESS WE MAY DRAW NEAR TO THEE; CONFESSING OUR FAULTS, CONFIDING IN THY GRACE, AND FINDING IN THEE OUR REFUGE AND OUR STRENGTH, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST THY SON, AMEN."
*KYRIE (CHOIR, CONGREGATION AND PASTOR)
*ASSURANCE OF PARDON - CHORAL AMEN
*PRAISE
*PASTOR: O LORD OPEN OUR LIPS.
*PEOPLE: AND OUR MOUTH SHALL SHOW FORTH THY PRAISE
*DOXOLOGY NO. 551
SCRIPTURE LESSON: II CORINTHIANS 9: 6-15
HYMN NO. 260 "LORD, THOU LOVEST THE CHEERFUL GIVER"
*AFFIRMATION OF OUR FAITH (APOSTLES' CREED)
*GLORIA PATRI
*CALL TO PRAYER
*PASTOR: THE LORD BE WITH YOU.
*PEOPLE: AND WITH THY SPIRIT.
*PASTOR: LET US PRAY.
*PRAYER AND PRAYER RESPONSE
OFFERING
OFFERTORY "CANTANDO" CONCONE

ANTHEM: "GOIN' HOME" DVORAK - ACCOMPANIMENT - KITTY FEDER - PIANO; ROL THOMPSON
SERMON: "STEALERS 74!"
PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER
*HYMN OF DEDICATION NO. 395 "FROM THEE ALL SKILL AND SCIENCE FLOW"
*BENEDICTION AND THREE FOLD AMEN
ORGAN POSTLUDE: "POSTLUDE IN B FLAT" VOLEKMAR
- - - - - - - - *CONGREGATION STANDING - - - - - - -

THE LOVELY FLOWERS ON THE ALTAR HAVE BEEN PLACED BY MRS. CARL MILLER IN MEMORY OF HER "HUSBAND".

SERVING AS USHERS TODAY ARE: *ALLEN BOTACCHI, JOHN REDMAN, DAN BOSKO, ROBERT KNAUER, CHARLES PENAR.

ELDER AND MRS. ROLAND THOMPSON WILL REPRESENT COUNCIL AT THE DOOR TODAY.

THE ATTENDANCE LAST SUNDAY WAS 184.

NURSERY WILL BE PROVIDED TODAY BY MRS. SHARON STAUFFER, LAUREL STAUFFER, AND DEBBIE MCBRIDE.

TODAY - 6:00 - YOUTH CHOIR - WE HAD AT LEAST 15 SIGN-UP.
TODAY - 7:00 - YOUTH FELLOWSHIP - THE YOUTH ARE TO COME IN COSTUME.
MONDAY - 7:30 - WOMEN'S MARY PRUGH CIRCLE MEETING.
WEDNESDAY - 7:30 - CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING.
TODAY - AFTER THE MORNING WORSHIP - THERE WILL BE A SHORT MEETING OF THE MARY MARTHA CIRCLE IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH - IT WILL ONLY TAKE A MINUTE OR TWO.

THE PASTOR WILL BE IN NORFOLK VIRGINIA - MONDAY THRU FRIDAY OF THIS WEEK. IF YOU SHOULD HAVE ANY PASTORAL NEEDS, PLEASE CONTACT BEA TAIT, OR THE REV. GRANVILLE COOPER.

NEXT SUNDAY IS CHRISTIAN ENLISTMENT SUNDAY - THE BUDGET WILL BE PRESENTED; THE UNDERSHEPHERDS WERE CONTACTED AND THEY WILL HAVE A SHORT MEETING AFTER WORSHIP SERVICE NEXT SUNDAY. THOSE NOMINATED FOR A THREE YEAR PERIOD FOR ELDER ARE: ROBERT BASEHORE, GENE STEPHENSON.
FOR DEACON: PAUL PFABE, DON KENNEDY, JOAN MASTER AND WILLIAM PFLUGH.

BILL PFLUGH WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO HELPED BRING THE SHUT-INS TO THE SERVICE LAST SUNDAY AFTERNOON. HE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK THE YOUTH, WOMEN AND MEN WHO SERVED AS USHERS AT DESHON DURING OCTOBER - WITHOUT YOU IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE.

WE WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND OUR THANKS TO BILL FOR THESE TWO NECESSARY PROJECTS - THANK YOU.

MR. PFABE HOSPITAL
WELCOME VISITORS

Perhaps this seem harsh when consider 1st time, 2
But must ask, "What G, say?"

Vs ~~#12xx~~Malachi 3
Many peop, many denom/chs adopt attitude"let G B satis what is left."
Thus own day/age "Stealers 74!".

Is. ot blesses many things but attitu begreudge G.
Early Xpians & chs give G 1st, other things 2nd.
slow/sure this change,
our needs/wants/desires 1st, G get leftovers

vs 9, must give G 1st place or face conseq.
Many fight hang on possess homes/prop/furn etc
But if many look C give G 2nd place may change thinking

G. says, vs 10

Peop reluc step out faith in give 2 G.
chs I serve each had peop say, "I no believe pledge"
That same pers buy house 20/25 yrs/car 3 yrs, this pledge.

What really say, "I believe pledge 4 me/not 4 G"
diff tween ch pledge other pledge/no can pay other pledge as C fit.
Pledge 2 ch, U give what U feel U want give

In all bus of give 2 G it matter trust G give health strength
Does not all come from G?
It matter trust G as says Mal 3:10, "He open windows hvn pour out bless."
We can never outgive G,
unless U know I mean, U no understand

It may come U health fam,
May B peace in marriage, obed children
May B content in job & peop work with
May take all forms, but G bless some way

(Illust. tithing & results) Letourneau
With inflation not poss every1 give 10%
But is poss all give cert. % money,
as well cert. % time & effort in ch. work

There not 1 us cannot spare G some time cause 2 busy
If so, we just that, "Too Busy."
& need alter our lives.

Simple fact all this, we created love G
This mean G wants all of us.
He no want portion, or what we want give,

"Stealers 74!"

T: Malachi 3:8-10
"Will man rob God? But you say, 'How are we robbing thee?' In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pur down for you an overflowing blessing."

Scripture: II Cor. 9:6-15

Preacher once remark: "I know what peop will put on my tombstone --- the beggar died."
Perhaps on many preach tombstone,
perhaps this peop think of preachers in gen

At risk this AM further this thot in some peop minds I speak subj ch peop no like hear-----MONEY
I no believe speak this often, but this time yr we consider budget & ch needs

I realize some folk just soon preach no refer 2 it
He not suppose think/worry bout it
MONEY fact life whether grocer/pastor ch

1 most quote story Js/story Gosps MAR. Luk & 3,4,vs story widow mite 12 21
Tells Js in syn nr treas, watch peop put mon in
Saw many wealth put lrg sums
widow put 2 sm coin = 1¢
Js tell disc this woman put more all rest
She gave what little she had to Lord &
it more accept
Given free give spirit

This story good obj lesson 4 all us
But also respons fallacy sum peop hav ch give
Fallacy Js condone give small gift & small gift more accept 2 God,
thus we can little as possib to G
(Illust. boy & best show for 5¢)
hate burst any illus bout give,
story by Js concern some1 only sm sum give/gave it
Js show pers may give lg sum/give no love give
V-, 6-7 Scripture in vain
ift of duty vs. gift love
(Illust. 89 yr old man & kiss) ALS. BLUE PICTURE
This gift love, this G wants from us
(Illust. Kennedy & Grand larceny)

He wants MONEY
He wants Time,
He wants abilities
& in return 4 give this His care, He prom bless far beyond measure

Must ask selves quest "Will we B part of crowd of "Stealers 74?"
Or will we ~~Expark~~ join ranks givers? in grat 4 what He give us?

I would suggest we gather 2gether as hus/wife/fams & pray earnestly/seriously B4 make decision what give.
G will lead if we seek Him sincerely.

Let us not B "Stealers 74," or "stealers" any other yr.
Let us instead B lovers of G & show it by actions & deeds for Him.

Remember P. say,
"He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Shirley & Ralph Charles Link, Nancy Link, Dale with Lianne his wife, Lloyd Link with Karen his wife
Jessica in front of Ralph C. Link
Ethan and Alicha in front of R. Dale and Lianne Link (the eldest son & family)

Ralph C. Link
153 Keck Road
Sarver, Pa. 16055
(412) 352-1103

Born: April 9, 1929, Pittsburgh, Pa.
Married: December 15, 1951
Wife: Shirley Margaret Neill
Born: December 8, 1930, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Children: Ralph Dale Link, born May 11, 1955, Pittsburgh, Pa.
Lloyd Alan Link, born May 28, 1958, Pittsburgh, Pa.
Nancy Lynn Link, born March 15, 1961, Butler, Pa.

SCHOOLING:

Graduated from Perry High School, Pittsburgh, Pa. June 1947

Lay Ministry School, Penn West Conference of United Church of Christ, September 1965 to May 1969

Commissioned Lay Minister June 1969

Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, Pa., September 1970

Graduated from Lancaster Theological Seminary May 1974

Ordained to Christian Ministry March 10, 1974

PASTORATES:

As Lay Minister: short term, 1 month or less in various churches 1965 to 1967

Emlenton Lamartine Charge of United Church of Christ 1967 to 1969

Short term in various churches 1970 until Seminary entrance July 1970

July 1970 to December 1973 Student Pastor at Trinity Charge, New Bloomfield, Duncannon, Pa., Penn Central Conference, United Church of Christ

December 1973 to present, St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Butler, Pa., Penn West Conference, United Church of Christ

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

OF

Ralph C. Link

I am the youngest of five children. I was born just prior to the onset of the Depression. Our family was very poor. My father was an alcoholic and my mother was a very religious person who was searching for the Lord. During my childhood she did her best to teach me the things of the Lord. Later in life she came to a personal relationship with Him.

I grew up in the Evangelical and Reformed Church where salvation by grace alone was not preached nor taught. I knew all about Jesus, what He did, how He lived, His miracles, His death and resurrection, but I didn't know Him personally.

My life had many ups and downs and all the while I was attending church and striving with my good works to please God. At a very low point in my life when we were deeply in debt and my wife and three children were all ill, I came to the crossroads. I watched a Billy Graham Crusade on television from some distant city and the message he preached seemed to be directed right at me. I wrestled with making that commitment to Christ, but didn't. The next afternoon and evening at work on the 4 to 12 shift I came to the conclusion that I needed to make that commitment to Christ. It seemed like there was no other choice if life was to have any meaning. That night when I came home from work at 1:00 A.M., I laid face down on the living room floor and told God that I couldn't live my life in my own strength and I accepted the gift of salvation from my Savior Jesus Christ. My life has never been the same.

Through several meaningful circumstances I was called by God to serve Him in the Christian Ministry and to help spread that wonderful message of salvation through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. What a wonderful and rewarding time it has been and I give Him all the praise for my salvation and the opportunity to serve Him.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

OF

Ralph C. Link

I believe the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired inerrant Word of God. I believe the Bible is the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men and it is the final authority for the Christian faith and life.

I believe in one God, who is eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I believe in the Diety of the Lord Jesus Christ that He is true God and true man. I believe that He was born of the Virgin Mary, that He lived in sinless life, that He performed the miracles recorded in Scripture, that He died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins, that He bodily arose from the dead, that He ascended on high where He is at the right had of Almighty God as our intercessor.

I believe in the Holy Spirit and that He comes and indwells each believer at the time of conversion. I believe that He lives in each believer to lead, to instruct, and to convict so that a believe may live a more godly life.

I believe that through the shed blood of Jesus Christ and through His resurrection, this is the only ground for justification and salvation for all who receive Him A Lord and Savior and to such as receive Him, they are born of the Holy Spirit and become children of God.

I believe water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of the Church but are not means of salvation.

I believe in the personal and premillennial and imminent coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe in the resurrection of the dead, for the believer to resurrection of life and joy with the Lord, for the unbeliever to resurrection of judgement and everlasting punishment.